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RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI PRIORITY 8482  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISLAMABAD 005362

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SUBJECT: CODEL SPECTER MEETS WITH AFGHAN PRESIDENT HAMID  
KARZAI

Classified By: Anne W. Patterson, Reasons 1.4 (b)

¶1. (C) Summary: Codel Specter had an impromptu meeting with visiting Afghan President Hamid Karzai December 27 in Islamabad. Karzai was extremely courteous and thanked Senator Specter and Representative Kennedy for continued USG assistance to Afghanistan. Karzai described his December 26 meeting with Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf as "positive," and expressed his hope that "Pakistan-Afghanistan ties will improve in the months to come." Notably, Karzai did not avail himself of the opportunity to lambast either Pakistan or Musharraf to this visiting Codel. End summary.

#### USG Assistance

¶2. (C) Visiting U.S. Senator Arlen Specter and U.S. Congressman Patrick Kennedy, accompanied by DCM, met December 27 in Islamabad with Afghan President Hamid Karzai. Karzai had just concluded his own meetings with the GOP.

¶3. (C) Karzai opened the meeting with effusive praise for USG assistance to his country. He pointed out that Afghanistan had come a long way since 2001 and will continue to progress with USG help. The CoDel reacted positively to Karzai's comments. They inquired into which types of projects worked best and whether additional USG assistance would be required. Karzai specifically cited USG-sponsored road construction as having led to enhanced economic activity in his country and increased wealth for his citizenry in general.

#### Counterterrorism Cooperation

¶4. (C) Turning to a question on the effectiveness of joint counterterrorism initiatives in the region, Karzai responded that his December 26 meeting with Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf was "extremely positive." He added that Pakistan-Afghanistan relations "had entered a new era."

¶5. (C) Karzai further explained that Pakistan had begun to suffer the effects of Talibanization, which would prompt it to cooperate more fully with Afghanistan. In his view, however, "the Taliban posed no long-term strategic threat to Afghanistan, but successfully thwarting the Taliban would require greater, sustained Pakistan-Afghanistan cooperation." Karzai concluded, "This will now happen."

¶6. (C) Asked for suggestions on how best to defeat the Taliban, Karzai noted that the group did not enjoy popular

support in Afghanistan. Repeating an earlier point, Karzai stressed that economic development in his country would defeat the Taliban. Karzai made a special effort to provide the CoDel with a positive assessment of Afghanistan's economic conditions, claiming that wealth was indeed being created. He emphasized that defeating the Taliban would require "time and Pakistan-Afghanistan cooperation."

¶17. (C) Responding to a specific question about the multilateral effort to capture Osama bin Laden, Karzai expressed confidence at its eventuality. Karzai quickly noted that bin Laden's continued freedom was not for lack of a concerted effort by all involved parties. He also pointed out that Coalition forces had been close numerous times in capturing bin Laden.

#### Counternarcotics Efforts

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¶18. (C) In response to Representative Kennedy's question on domestic drug use in Afghanistan, Karzai professed that his government recognized the domestic drug use problem as a national issue. It had recently been discussed in a cabinet meeting, claimed Karzai. He estimated that as many as 100,000 Afghans were users of illicit drugs. He felt the problem was actually getting worse, exacerbated by Afghani refugees recently returned from Iran.

¶19. (C) Karzai responded warmly to Representative Kennedy's suggestion that he invite to Afghanistan a bipartisan Congressional delegation specifically to discuss the drug use problem as a national and international issue.

ISLAMABAD 00005362 002 OF 002

#### Engaging Iran

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¶10. (C) Turning to Senator Specter's question on how best to deal with Iran's nuclear aspirations, Karzai insisted that more dialogue was needed. Karzai added, "confrontation will not work." Instead, the USG (and international community) must find ways to engage Iran. Karzai explained that the acquisition of nuclear weapons for a country in this region was much more than a strategic issue, it bolsters national pride as well as creating a sense of safety regarding national security.

¶11. (C) Senator Specter asked for Karzai's views on how best to encourage Iran to engage in a dialogue with the U.S. Karzai responded that it would be hard but that we should remember that the Iranian population was not anti-U.S. by nature. Senator Specter then proposed a possible "parliamentary exchange" between the U.S. and Iran to promote engagement with Iran.

¶12. (C) Comment: While we will wait to see what, if any, positive and proactive steps either side actually takes to enhance the level of cooperation between the two governments, we are cautiously encouraged by the fact that President Karzai did not use this private meeting to lambast either Pakistan or President Musharraf personally to a captive Congressional audience. End comment.

¶13. (U) This cable has not been cleared by Codel Specter.

PATTERSON